

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

Third Sunday of Lent

First reading:

(Exodus 3.1-8, 13-15)

Moses at the Burning Bush

In our Lenten progress through the story of God's people, we come to the crucial moment of the revelation of God's name to Moses. This is a decisive moment, because to give your name is a sign of trust and friendship. Someone who has your name has power over you in all kinds of ways, so you give it only to those you trust.

The Hebrews, descendants of Abraham, are at a low point, a mere rabble of oppressed immigrants, lacking land or security, marked out for extermination by a powerful bureaucratic state. It is as if God had waited for this moment to raise them up, to create them as a coherent group with a leader who could stand up for them in God's name. God does not yet give the meaning of the name; perhaps 'I am who I am' even means 'You mind your own business'. It is something to do with Being, and the Greek translation of the Bible understands it as 'Pure Being', 'the One who Is'.

In the Hebrew Bible the meaning of the name is given later on Sinai, after Israel's worship of the Golden Bull, when God passes before Moses crying out the name, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God of mercy and forgiveness.' This is the meaning that will echo down the Bible in passage after passage.

Question:

What qualities in God are most important to you in your approach to God?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 10.1-6, 10-12)

The Rock which is Christ

As in the previous two Sundays, the second reading moves the first reading into a higher gear. God revealed his name to Moses in the desert, led the Israelites across the sea and cared for them in the desert with manna for food and water from the rock to drink. Now Paul explains to us that the real meaning of the rock is Christ who nourishes us.

How 'the rock that followed them'? Paul uses the current rabbinic explanation of the two accounts of Moses striking the rock for water: it is not two accounts of the same incident, for they are separate incidents. The same rock accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the desert.

However, Paul is writing to chide the Corinthians on their undisciplined behaviour, especially at the Eucharist. Despite the wonders that accompanied the Israelites, the desert wanderings were a time of infidelity and rebellion that even the God of mercy and forgiveness was compelled to correct. Let the Corinthians learn their lesson! Even though their Christian life was marked by plentiful gifts of the Spirit, they must repent of their wild behaviour.

Question:

Is Christ a rock that follows you around in life? Does he give you water?

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Gospel:

(Luke 13.1-9)

Time for Repentance

We have seen Luke's stress on Jesus' message of repentance and forgiveness. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Peter must admit his sinfulness before he is called to be an apostle. At the end, the good thief acknowledges his guilt and is welcomed into Jesus' kingdom. This gospel reading, with its historical examples and its parable, reinforces the Old Testament lesson of repentance, the constant theme with Luke.

In the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the latter wins through: his prayer is only 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' Every proclamation of the gospel in Luke's Acts of the Apostles ends with an appeal for repentance. Repentance means not simply bewailing our sins but doing something about it, changing our way of life, our scale of values. However, we are made in the image of God, and cannot expect God's forgiveness unless we too follow God's example and show the same forgiveness to others. The sinful woman who loved much was forgiven much (Luke 7.36-50). Neither is Luke the only evangelist to stress this point. Matthew adds at the end of the Lord's Prayer the saying of Jesus that underlines the importance of the single petition, 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive others.'

Question:

What is the most rotten part of your fig tree that you really need to change? Would the sacrament of reconciliation help? What sort of injury do you find it hardest to forgive? An affront to your pride, your pocket or your person? Is there anyone you have not forgiven?
